



2014 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Semifinals · Practice Day · Baylor vs. Kentucky
Purcell Pavilion at the Joyce Center · Notre Dame, Ind.
Friday, March 28

SEMIFINAL PRACTICE DAY QUOTES – Kentucky

Matthew Mitchell - Head Coach

On differences in the team since the four-overtime game versus Baylor...

“Well I hope we are better defensively than we were in that game. We struggled defensively in that game as you could see. Giving up 90 points in regulation was tough. We’ve certainly tried to get better in ball screen defense, and I think we are going to have to do a good job in this game. They just get it to Odyssey [Sims] so many times and let her create out of pick-and-roll situations. It’s very critical that we do a good job there. I just think all of their players have gotten better surrounding Odyssey. I think their freshmen have improved greatly since the game in Dallas. [Makenzie] Robertson is playing really good. Their post players have developed, and it’s impressive to see what their coaching staff has done with the team since December.”

On potential matchup problems against Baylor...

“There are a lot of things that can give us problems. They just do such a good job taking care of the basketball. Their point guard is leading the nation in assist-to-turnover ratio, and it’s just really impressive to watch her run the team. It’s amazing to me how strong Odyssey Sims is physically to be able to do what she does. The ball is in her hands almost every play and she just makes so much happen. She is a really difficult matchup. I think their size inside creates some challenges at the rim. We will have to play a heck of a game to win this one tomorrow, and we need to do a good job preparing today.”

On attempts in first meeting with Baylor to stop Odyssey Sims...

“We had four people in the game that we assigned to her. Bria [Goss] had her for a lot of the game. Bernisha [Pinkett] had her for a lot of the game. Kastine [Evans] covered her a lot, and then Jennifer [O’Neill] was on her some. I think we need to try our very best to switch it up and try to break her rhythm. She does a great job figuring out what you are going to do and attacking the defense. She was so hot that night that it didn’t matter what we tried to do. We have to do a really good job on her. She is so physical and used to having people try to deny her. We just have to stay patient because she’s just going to make you look bad some times. The whole team just has to do a good job trying to slow her down.”

On what the four overtime game with Kentucky means to him...

"It was one of those games that doesn't have a big bearing on tomorrow but when the season is done and you're looking back over the season, obviously it was the highest scoring game of all-time and it garnered a lot of national attention. It showed us how fleeting those moments are because we couldn't win a game in January. It was a great night for Jennifer [O'Neill] and amazing to go back and watch that game. There were so many offensive plays in the game that you couldn't believe. It was an amazing thing to be a part of and something we will celebrate when the season is over and we are thinking of great moments. For Jennifer, I don't know if it was of any particular significance. The great thing about Jennifer is that her days are sort of 'to be determined.' She may not even remember the game, to be honest with you. She's fun in that way."

On the rollercoaster nature of Kentucky's season...

"I've learned a lot this season as a coach. We have a veteran team, and I've always tried to never make any assumptions about teams and wipe the slate clean each year. As a coach, I don't think I did quite a good job making sure everyone was on the same page. Then, we had the injury to DeNesha [Stallworth] and experienced some adversity. Instead of coming together, we just sort of fragmented. To the players' credit, they did the work that was necessary and were brutally honest with me and told me where I wasn't doing a good job. We were able to bring it back together, but in January everyone was sort of succumbing to expectations. I thank the good Lord for giving us the strength to come back together and be honest with each other. I think coming down the stretch we've played some pretty good basketball."

On keys for tomorrow's game with Baylor...

"I think the key defensively is transition. We can't let them get out and score easy baskets in transition. They run the floor and have explosive guards who can make plays in transition. We have to find some way to have Odyssey [Sims] play an average game. It's scary because somebody is going home tomorrow, and I know our kids don't want to go home and their players certainly don't. We need to be really solid and play sharp defensively. They do play out of the ball screen a lot so that will be very important. As much as possible, we need to keep it out of Sims' hands and make somebody else make a play. The final key on defense is rebounding the ball. You can force Sims into tough shots but you need to grab the rebound and not give them a second chance because she won't miss a second time. We need to get this thing going really up tempo and take advantage of our explosiveness. We are a fast team so we need to make that work as much as we can."

On what he was thinking during the first meeting with Baylor...

"I thought it was going to end a couple times. I thought we had it won two times and I thought we had lost it two times. That was one we didn't want to lose because we were out there a long time. It is amazing to look back on it and watch it. It is amazing how these kids were able to make plays and we were just trying to hang in there and regroup. The thing that I remember the most from the game was Baylor's Alexis Prince almost hitting a three at the buzzer when she could barely walk. I thought we had it there and if that had gone in, I don't know what would've happened. It rimmed out, and I remember being really happy. It was a memorable night and a memorable game."

Bria Goss – Junior – Guard

On the confidence gained from win over Baylor in December...

"After that hard game in December, I think that were coming into this game with a lot of confidence because of the way were playing and practicing. That was a long time ago. They have gotten better; we

have gotten better. It's going to be a different game, but we still have confidence just because of a confidence within each other really."

On memories from the four-overtime matchup...

"The thing that really stuck with me was after coach got a tech in a really crazy part of the game that could have put them (Baylor) up or given them the tie, Jen really got us together and said, 'All right, here we go y'all, let's get it together and get back on track.' She really refocused the group that was on the floor."

On guarding Odyssey Sims...

"She is one of the best players in the country. I'm honored to have the ability to guard her. Coach has the confidence in me to guard her. I'm just going to act like she is just another player. I can't go in too high or too low and just think it's another game when it's not, but doing what needs to be done for the team is really what is on my mind."

On the team meeting in January...

"It was really important. They (the coaches) made a highlight tape for us, and we saw that we were having a lot of fun in the beginning of the year and were playing with a purpose, and that's really what I got out of that meeting: that we needed to get back to that. Making plays and playing with a purpose."

On the keys to the game...

"We have to make it about us and what we can do to control the game. We can't worry about Baylor or how the refs are calling the game or any of that. It's about Kentucky."

On Jennifer O'Neill's 43 points against Baylor in December...

"That's a lot of points, Jen. Way to go. During the game, I knew she had a lot, but I didn't know exactly how many. She was our go to in that game. Jen just really stepped up. Not only was she scoring, but she was being a leader as well by just talking to us and keeping us poised."

On the 80 fouls called in the matchup in December and the hand-checking rules...

"Those rules are tough. There are times when we disagree with it, but the call has been called and we have to move on to the next play. Whether we adjust to it or not, I don't think there will be 80 fouls called this time. It's going to be a great game to watch. It's going to be really physical."

Jennifer O'Neill – Junior – Guard

On the confidence gained from win over Baylor in December...

"We are coming into this game with a lot of confidence, but we know we are playing against a great team. Just because we won the last game doesn't mean we're going to win this game if we don't come out to play."

On how Baylor has grown since the last matchup...

"I don't really know how they have grown or changed. I haven't really watched film on them or anything. I know we have grown and changed. That game DeNesha [Stallworth] didn't even really play that well, but I feel like she can be the x-factor in this game. It's going to be a totally different game this time."

On her 43 points in the first matchup...

"I didn't know I had 43 points at all. I just wanted to win."

DeNesha Stallworth – Senior – Forward

On memories from four-overtime matchup...

"My favorite memory was also the score and knowing how hard we worked. The outcome was just fantastic."

On keys to the game...

"Containing Odyssey [Sims] is obviously going to be important. It's difficult to stop her. We have to limit her to jump shots. She is a great driver and can get to the rim easily."

On Jennifer O'Neill's 43 points against Baylor in December...

"I think Jen was really fearless that game. She wasn't thinking—she was just playing. She is a great shooter and she can get to the basket. She was just the best player that game."